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ABSTRACT

Dropout rates at the college and university level are much higher for students of minority cultures than for their majority culture peers. This paper suggests that the "revolving door" scenario of minority-culture college students can be stemmed by the proper use of mentoring. A combination of successful peers (interpreters), university professionals (go-betweens), and community members of the same cultural group (models) could aid these students in becoming bicultural and adept at survival in the majority setting without denying their cultural heritage. The paper also presents descriptions of CD-ROM based technology that would provide a delivery system for this support program. Multimedia mentoring could incorporate photographs, taped interviews, interactive scenarios, and video segments. This would alleviate the need for live interviews and enable a larger pool of mentors to be accessed, including mentors from other campuses. Remedies are suggested that could positively affect the ability of culturally diverse students to remain in college and university settings until graduation. (Author/TD)

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A PROPOSAL TO IMPROVE RETENTION RATES OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS IN THE COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY SETTING USING INTERPRETERS, GO-BETWEENS, AND MODELS

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ABSTRACT

Drop out rates at the college and university level are much higher for culturally diverse students than their majority culture peers. The position of this paper is that the "revolving door" scenario of culturally diverse college students can be stemmed by the proper use of mentoring. The pater suggests that a combination of successful peers (Interpreters), university professionals (Go-Betweens), and community members (Models) could aid these students in becoming bicultural and adapt at survival in the majority setting.

The paper also presents descriptions of the CD Rom based technology that would provide a delivery system for this program of aid. The paper suggests remedies that could positively effect the ability of culturally diverse students in remaining in college and university setting until graduation.

Culturally diverse student populations in American Colleges and Universities are increasing at a rapid rate as ethnic, cultural, and racial minorities seek to expand opportunities through higher education. This diversity of cultures is growing and projections indicate that Caucasians may well be in the minority in public schools within the next 30 to 40 years. The census of 1990, indicates that 31.8 million people in the U.S. communicate in their daily lives in 329 languages other than English (Vandansky 1993). This explosion of minority culture populations in the public school sector will be mirrored by American college and university populations. Many of these students will need specialized services to avoid "dropping out" from the majority cultural setting.

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Meeting the needs of this growing culturally diverse student population in our colleges and universities requires direct effort on the part of responsible mentors including faculty members, community members, and selected peers. These researchers believe that properly selected mentors can assist the culturally different student in social adjustment, understanding majority cultural expectations,and methods of adapting successfully to the majority setting while still valuing the positive aspects of their own culture. Positive guidance and support in moving from a simply multi-ethnic environment to a truly multicultural setting is necessary to enhance the quality of life for culturally diverse students on a predominately white college or university campus. There must be conscious effort based on assessment of the social and academic environmental conditions that fit each campus. Culturally diverse students will benefit from a campus atmosphere that promotes and facilitates a sense of inclusion in the university setting. This sense of belonging should pervade all aspects of campus life including classroom, housing, campus activities, and any and all aspects of the campus community.

The contention of this article is that the culturally diverse student need not deny his/her cultural heritage. It must be demonstrated in campus community interactions that the culturally diverse student can succeed in the majority setting yet remain a positive force within his or her cultural community. Many minority students have demonstrated intellectual skills simply be gaining admission to the university. It seems that they could use these intellectual skills, supplemented with guidance, in acquiring necessary tools to succeed in the majority setting. Those very same skills that provided the opportunity of enrollment may also serve as the necessary skills for survival in the dominant cultural setting. The student is not being asked to replace his or her own culture, rather he/she is acquiring an additional set skills to become more successfully by-cultural.

The "revolving door" syndrome of minority students on predominantly white university campuses must be stemmed. In stopping this process one can see that Richardson and Skinner (1990), Steele (1992), and Geradi (1990), have identified cultural devaluation as behind much of the failure and poor retention rates of minority students. Additionally Steel (1992) in his work concerning "...the schooling blacks in America..." suggests that this lack of acculturation to the majority setting negatively affects the success rates of any minority group placed in a predominately white educational environment.

Richardson and Skinner (1990), the their study of organizational influences on student achievement, point out that is the past many of the "calls" for institutions to change to accommodate cultural diversity have been interpreted as calls to reduce "quality" rather than calls to positively enhance the diverse student's chances to succeed in a strange and new cultural setting. Richardson and Skinner suggest that "...institutions can achieve both quality and diversity through adaptations that support

achievement by more diverse learners...". (pp.485-486)

Geradi's (1990), findings regarding the academic potential of minority and low-socioeconomic students, observes, "...these data seem to suggest that the empirical reality of minority and low-socioeconomic background students' capabilities are hidden behind the traditional cognitive variables as the sole predictor of academic success...".

Steele (1992) notes, "Clearly, something is missing from our understanding of black underachievers. Disadvantage contributes, yet blacks underachieve even when they have ample resources, strong value education, and are prepared better than adequately in terms of knowledge and skills. Something else has to be involved...That something else, I believe has to do with the process of identifying with school...". Richard Nisbett, Andrew Reaves and Claude Steele cited by Steele (1990), "...found that attitudes related to disidentification were more strongly predictive of grades than even academic preparation (that is, SAT'S and high school grades)."

Finally, deAnda (1984), suggests that "...at least six factors affect the degree to which a member of an ethnic minority group can or is likely to become bicultural:

1. ...The degree of overlap between the two cultures...
2. The availability of cultural translators, mediators, and models...
3. The amount and type of corrective feedback...
4. The minority individual and their mesh with the prevalent or valued styles of the majority culture.
5. The individual's degree of bilingualism.
6. The degree of dissimilarity in physical appearance from the majority..."

METHOD

This paper proposes that the three types of mentors be sought for each culturally diverse student entering the predominately white university to provide assistance to these students. The mentors would be based on the descriptions provided by deAnda (1984) of cultural translators, mediators and models that are recommended as vehicles for mentoring of culturally diverse students in the academic acculturation process. Our description suggests that **Interpreters** are members of the some cultural group as the student, who have been successful in the majority setting. **Go-Betweens** are members of the mainstream culture who are comfortable with, and relatively proficient in, the culture of the student and are willing to work with the student. **Models** are of the same culture as the student but are not directly related to the university.

Recruitment and training of mentors and students in joint orientation settings is an absolute necessity. With the identification of students and potential mentors planning for training must provide for seeking genuine opportunities for access

to the process of becoming bi-cultural. Rather than providing artificial settings, genuine scenarios and settings should be put in place. The more "real" rather than "modeled" opportunities the more success will be demonstrated by the students.

In addition, planners should identify points of "conflict", and potential "conflict", and develop means for defusing them. Interpreters, go-betweens, and models must be trained in the methods of providing positive corrective feedback in a manner that is palatable and useful to the student. **Corrective feedback** is vital to the acculturation process. **Affect** is highly culture driven and the source of great anxiety to the culturally diverse student.

Helping the student to expand his skills in **problem solving** is another area that the cultural mentor must address. The mentor must recognize that this is a complex issue that may require outside resources. As many of the majority members of the campus as possible need to be aware of why and what is involved in the mentoring process. The highest levels of administration and leadership on the campus, especially the President or Chancellor must be informed and committed to the process. Without that support the program may become nothing more than another well meaning bit of public relations that has only the value of theatrics and provides no meaningful help for the diverse student.

The authors propose to implement the use of the latest CD Rom technology to facilitate identifying both mentors and students. Interactive biographical information concerning mentors placed on CD-Rom located in convenient settings will allow students to peruse the files for compatible potential mentors. Inclusion of information in recruitment and registration packets will encourage new student interest. This technology combined with active faculty involvement in finding students in need will provide better access to assistance for culturally diverse students.

MULTIMEDIA MENTORING

Finding interpreters, go-betweens, and models is no small task. Additionally identification of students in need of assistance is an equally daunting task. This joint task of locating appropriate mentors for diverse students can be facilitated by the use of multimedia. Originally, multimedia was defined as any combination of two or more media in one presentation format, for example photographic slides used in conjunction with as audio cassette. However, more recently, multimedia has been defined as, "the convergence of text, graphics, images, sound and full-motion video..." (Pinheiro & Oblinger, 1993, p. 3) through the controlling platform of a computer.

The advantage of using multimedia to mentor culturally diverse students reflects the use of a principle borrowed from the concept of Total Quality Management, that is, just-in-time resourcing (Hudspeth, 1994). With the use of multimedia, the need to arrange live interviews or sessions between mentors and students is

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alleviated. Instead, a database of potential mentors, including interpreters, go-betweens, and models, can be established over time, in digitized format. This idea allows for the inclusion of photographs, taped interviews, interactive scenarios, and even video segments into multimedia presentations compressed onto CD-Rom disks.

Another of advantage of multimedia mentoring is that a larger collection of mentors can be accessed, including mentors from other campuses. Further, multimedia instruction can address two target populations, either potential mentors or culturally diverse student, with only minor modifications to the came program.

A prototype model for multimedia mentoring of culturally diverse students includes the use of a multimedia computer, an authoring program and a 35-mm camera. Two major multimedia components were selected for use: A Photo-CD holding color photographs of the three types of mentors and accompanying speech recordings.

The production of the Photo-CD required the use of a 35-mm camera to take pictures of interpreters, go-betweens, and models. Several photos were taken of each type of mentor for the various minority cultures represented in the student population. The resulting photos were digitized onto a CD-ROM disk. With slight modification, this methodology also lends itself to the incorporation of short movies or clips of video which can be locally produced and then digitized for use in the computer.

The inclusion of sound is done through the computer, which is equipped with a sound card and an attached microphone. The recording effort entails recording interview responses of the mentors either directly into the computer or onto audio tape for future import.

The computer software allows for the compilation of the final version of the instructional program into a format which downloads onto a CD-ROM disk. The construction of a CD-ROM version of the completed instructional program requires that a CD-ROM "maker" be attached to the computer. The CD-ROM maker accepts the program from the computer and then records a stand-alone, CD-ROM version for distribution and use.

CONCLUSION

It appears to be time to end the negative experiences of too many minority students attempting to succeed in higher education. Colleges and universities must find the will to make significant change. The authors suggest a remedy is available in the use of interpreters, go-betweens, and models combined with up to date CD ROM technology to identify both potential mentors and students in need of help. It appears to be time to end the negative experiences of too many minority students attempting to succeed in higher education. Colleges and universities must find the will to make significant change.

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